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ABSTRACT

This paper explores aspects of Indigenous knowledge on several levels and examines the role of Indigenous knowledge in Indigenous empowerment as the number and influence of Native people in academia increases. Indigenous peoples worldwide have a common set of assumptions that forms a context or paradigm--a collective core of interrelated assertions about Indigenous reality. Indigenous knowledge is spiritually based and spiritually derived. To remove the spiritual foundation of Indigenous knowledge is to destroy its very soul--a fact not lost on colonialist regimes. Colonial governments and institutions deprecated Indigenous knowledge and cultures and thereby justified denying Indigenous peoples a meaningful political role. The first order of Indigenous self-determination is the task of revealing the Indigenous experience, long written out of official histories. Historically, Indigenous peoples have been dependent on non-Natives to assist in developing the necessary dialogue to resist domination and exploitation. The outcome has been a history of research by the dominant culture, within the dominant discourse. This discourse devalues Indigenous knowledge and is one strategy by which the West legitimatizes its own knowledge. Indigenous peoples must have an intellectual space in which to develop their own frameworks and methodologies regarding intellectual self-determination. These frameworks would then require the institutional support of the Academy and would engage "others'" discourse in a constructive manner. Instances of discourse between Indigenous Africans and Native Americans are described. (Contains 32 references.) (SV)

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AS A TOOL FOR SELF DETERMINATION AND LIBERATION

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Indigenous Knowledge as a Tool for Self Determination and Liberation

Introduction

Indigenous knowledge, the term I use frequently, is in itself an act of self determination. What I propose here is an Indigenous piece of work that moves beyond “voice”, or even perspective. Rather, it embraces Indigenous knowledge which operates on several levels crossing cultural boundaries, time and space. Within this essay, I demonstrate that Indigenous people have a common set of assumptions which forms a context or paradigm, that is to say, a collective core of interrelated assertions about Indigenous reality. Indigenous, for my purposes, is defined as she/he who: a) is born into lands with which she/he maintains an intimate and spiritual relationship with; b) belongs to a distinct linguistic cultural group; c) has maintained a collective oral memory reaching as far back as creation; d) has unique customs and ceremonies that sustain her/his cultural survival and well being; e) has maintained the view that elders are the knowledge carriers and cultural historians.

In response to modernization, Indigenous peoples world wide have found a resounding similarities their philosophical, ideological and cosmological concepts. Collectively, Indigenous peoples from North America have denounced assumptions about Indigenous people presupposed in "Western thought". (Mohawk, Alfred, Smith, Colorado, Warrior, Monture Angus, Churchill, Lyons to name a few) have also begun to construct an inclusive discourse (albeit one which outlines base assumptions and critiques) which is as yet sporadic, and yet not fully articulated. The justification for the validity of Indigenous knowledge is founded on Indigenous Universal law; as such, knowledge is spiritually based and spiritually derived. To remove the spiritual foundation of Indigenous knowledge would be to destroy its very soul; and that very fact has never been lost to the colonialist regimes.

Indigenous people bring with them an ancient knowledge system that serves both to demonstrate their distinctive form of knowledge, as well as its dynamics; its ability to recreate itself in modern settings is testimony to its resiliency. The historical (that is colonial) misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples within a Western political structure is viewed by many as a systematic

rhetoric developed precisely in order to justify the oppression and genocide of Native and “others” (Churchill 1997:1 & 1998, Jaimes 1992:1). Nor is academic research free of systemic bias. In this capacity, Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999:44) states,

This sense of what the idea of the West represents is important...because to a large extent theories about research are underpinned by a cultural system of classification and representation, by views about human nature, human morality and virtue, by conceptions of space and time, by conceptions of gender and race. Ideas about these things help determine what is real. Systems of classification and representation enable different traditions or fragments of traditions to then be played out in systems of power and domination, with real material consequences for colonized peoples.

From an Indigenous view, the relationship between theory and practice is a critical one in the pursuit of social justice. Based on their experience of having witnessed the impact of the malignant social realities that emanated from ill informed colonial policies, Indigenous people are keen authorities on the relationship between theory and practice. The state utilized the church as the agents of ethnocide (see Milloy *A National Crime* 1999). For Indigenous peoples education and Christianity were the colonial institutions employed to “kill the Indian and save the man.” (*The White Man’s Indian*: PBS documentary)

Many of the colonial policies virtually paralyzed the political agency of an already marginalized (and often powerless) peoples. In an colonial era of hostile governments implementing assimilation policies and promoting corporate values, (progress and development) Indigenous cultures were severely disadvantaged in their attempts to survive in their traditional ecological ways. Hunting cultures, long viewed as inferior, underdeveloped and unworthy of preservation by western state institutions, have been given the death sentence. (Brody 1981, Berkhofer 1979, Berger 1977 & 1991) The West needed to 'manufacture consent' to justify deprecation of Indigenous Knowledge and culture; used both the sciences and media to reach this objective (Herman & Chomsky 1988 Berkhofer 1979).

As Indigenous scholars Ward Churchill and Annette Jaimes argue, the U.S. has yet to acknowledge the existence of the Native American Holocaust which, in its historical moment, entailed the decimation and, in some cases, the elimination of some Indigenous populations. In comparing the two well known mass genocides, Churchill poses an interesting question: "If the Germans had succeeded in their genocidal attempts then wrote a history/defense of it, would it read like American history?" (Churchill 1997:406,

Jaimes 1992:5) Former Canadian Judge and lawyer Thomas Berger wrote: "To the European conquerors, the Indians had no story to tell...[and] the images they portray [of the Indigenous population] go a long way towards explaining Spain's unwillingness and ours to accord Indians a meaningful place in the political firmament." (Berger 1991:14) According to Berger and others then, **the first order of Indigenous self-determination is the task of revealing the Indigenous experience, one that has long been appropriated by official colonial accounts of history which have systematically written the "Indian" out.**

Decolonizing our minds

Recent work by Indigenous scholars has shown that when engaging with issues such as self determination and Aboriginal social justice, an analytical framework is imperative for solving various problems along with processes of participants. Issues such as resistance, cultural survival and ethnocentrism are relevant to an analysis of the colonial process and its distinct impact upon Indigenous cultures and rights. The contributions of new Indigenous scholars to Indigenous theory and methodology speak

to the larger question of Indigenous peoples knowledge and contributions to intellectual thought, globally.

Throughout the past decade I, a Mohawk woman have been collecting ethnographic data from a variety of Indigenous Elders regarding the emergent Indigenous expression of Indigenous thought or paradigms. The central focus of this rests in the idea that Indigenous people have a different way of viewing the world. Thus, a primary hypothesis here is that Indigenous ideas about their world are more similar to one another than they are to their EuroNorth American counterparts. As such, discovering similar philosophical and ideological constructs among Indigenous cultures (or the structure of Indigenous knowledge) has been an empowering tool for Indigenous peoples.

Historically, Indigenous peoples have been dependant on non Natives to assist them in developing the necessary dialogue to resist domination and exploitation; the outcome has been a history of research by the dominant culture, within the dominate discourse, a discourse which continues to plague Indigenous constructions of knowledge, depreciating our knowledge as invalid, inferior, mythological, and unscientific. In fact, the devaluing of Indigenous knowledge is one of the strategies by which the West legitimates

its own knowledge (Persky 1998, *Delgamuukw*). What I set forth here is the argument that Indigenous peoples must have an intellectual space in which to develop their own frameworks and methodologies regarding intellectual self determination. Our frameworks which would then require the institutional support of the Academy. Our frameworks would then engage “others” discourse in a constructive manner.

The current literature validates the idea that there is a “Native paradigm,” and although it may not be fully or fairly articulated in a Western academic context, it certainly exists. A new generation of Indigenous thinkers needs to explore how a people [original peoples] can be so alike to one another vis a vis their cultural and social constructs, philosophies and political ideologies while remaining so unlike their “colonial settlers.” The Indigenous ideology, which is spiritually driven, is not a product of colonialism but a revelation through resistance in asserting self determination. This revelation, despite the hegemony of the West, allowed Indigenous cultures to thrive into the new millennium. Indigenous Knowledge directs us to revisit our past before we can begin construction of our colonial histories, breaking down barriers developed to divide peoples such as Native Americans and African

Americans. The first order then, is to point out key elements which distinguish our experiences from each other. For example, the church /educational institutions have historically been “cites” of empowerment and resistance for African Americans struggle for liberation, while for Native Americans both of those institutions have been the agents of ethnocide. For Indigenous people “traditional” institutions have been their liberating agencies from colonial oppression. Western law has been used to undermine our Nations sovereignty and rights, we seek to reclaim nationhood.

**Indigenous people dismantling Western claims to power:
Decolonization**

The time has come to break the barriers that divide people such as Native Americans and African Americans. Indigenous peoples of the world can unite to dismantle Western claims to global power. Even at it s best, history shows that Western Liberal ideology has not helped Indigenous peoples. Patricia Monture Angus a law professor of Mohawk ancestry argues that the legal framework of the West has been the tool which dispossessed, exploited and denied Aboriginal peoples’ rights, it is not the tool that will liberate ourselves or lead to self determination (Monture

Angus 1999). The key to self determination and liberation is nested in the traditional Indigenous constructions of knowledge, laws and institutions. What I have witnessed in my own community at Six Nation Territory of the Grand River and in other Indigenous communities is not simply an application of resistance using traditional institutions and knowledge but a model of self determination through restructuring traditional institutions in a modern setting. Reclaiming authority is integral to the process of liberation from colonialism. The Indigenous movement world wide has consistently struggled for land rights, cultural survival and political and environmental coexistence (Churchill 1999:37, Wearne 1996:, Jaimes 1992:1). The impact colonialism has had on the Indigenous movements includes dividing the Christian Indigenous peoples from those that maintained “traditional” institutions and beliefs. For example in my community of Six Nations, those that adopted Christianity agreed with colonial agencies to “overthrow” the traditional leadership and government in 1924, with the help of an Indian Agent imported from the Boer Wars by Indian Affairs. Colonial Morgan’s agenda was to “undermine the sovereignty” of the Six Nations” using Christianized members to institute a colonially empowered tribal

government. (Titley 1986) The division still plagues the ability to unite on localized levels.

Therefore, we should focus on the conceptual framework needed for exploring positions of authority, determining frames of reference and bringing together the various knowledge of Indigenous peoples in and outside of Canada. It is my position, an Indigenous paradigm can bridge our work with the African American experiences without the all the baggage western discourse imposes on the “other.” Indigenous peoples discourses can provide a relationship with African/Native Americans free from “having to prove ourselves as valid, we start with that assumption, I interviewed several African Americans from New Orleans with Native American ancestry to develop this point. Excerpts will be presented to expand the discourse, later.

Indigenous Knowledge and Power

Indigenous knowledge is by no means a simple, universal “Indigenous” knowledge that can be placed in the global arena for deconstruction or mass consumption. The diverse cultures, histories, symbolic orders, and “world views” are not a set of identical experiences which establish “a Native Perspective.” Rather,

Indigenous peoples have a set of assumptions about social reality, dynamics, and values systems which are immersed in spiritual relationships with the natural world, a tradition of ideas that when brought together form a common adherence to the Creators natural law (Alfred 1999:4, Hill 1992:63). The commonality is worked out in diverse and distinctive ways depending on where we live on the earth.

What was the consciousness of Indigenous peoples of the Americas before the arrival of Europeans? John Mohawk, a Seneca scholar, refers to the development of the Iroquois Great Law, which established a Confederacy with the principle of peace. The Peacemaker convinced the Five Nations that thinking with reason, one can achieve peace and a good mind. He argued that using the power of persuasion is more powerful than ruling through fear. He was articulating the Great Law about the same time the Europeans were developing their conquistador thinking (Barreiro 1992:25). The concepts developed by the Iroquois, precontact, demonstrate a consciousness that existed prior to the arrival of Europeans. It also illustrates how the philosophy of the Peacemaker was a sophisticated and wise system that promoted strength through unity (Wright 1993:223, Lyons and Mohawk 1992:1). It is only recently,

however, that scholars of the West have examined the First Americans as interdependent societies with political, social, and economic structures which operated on intellectually developed sets of principles. (Weatherford 1988, Knudston and Suzuki 1992) It is the traditional knowledge systems that will inform our resistance to the residual colonial mind sets amongst our people today. We must begin to re-educate ourselves and others in ways the will foster liberation and self-determination.

Patrick Minge's, "Beneath the Underdog: Race Religion and the Trail of Tears" (1994, available: <http://www.users.interport.net/~wovoka/underdg7.html>) article states:

In the fields and homes of the colonial plantations of the United States in the late eighteenth century, the first intimate relations between African American and Native American peoples were forged in their collective oppression at the hands of the "peculiar institution." The institution of the African slavery, as it developed in the New World, was based upon the lessons learned in the enslavement of traditional peoples of the Americas...During this transitional period, Africans and Native Americans shared the common experience of enslavement. In addition to working together in the fields, they lived together in communal living quarters, produced collective recipes for food and herbal remedies, shared myths and legends, and ultimately became lovers. The intermarriage of Africans and Native Americans was facilitated by the disproportionality of African male slaves to female (3 to 1) and the decimation of

Native American males by disease, enslavement, and prolonged wars with the colonists. As Native American societies in the Southeast were primarily matrilineal, African males who married Native American women often became members of the wife's clan and citizens of the respective nation.

The common bond between Indigenous people rests not only negatively in their collective colonial experience but also positively in a belief system based on a consciousness which empowers the people.

The Indigenous conceptualization of power and powerlessness differs from the Western notions of power. For us, it would be erroneous to define power in terms of material possessions. In "our" arenas, to be powerless is to not even "know" who you are; to be weak is to display disrespect and ignorance. We perceive Western cultures claim to objective rationality in their social constructions of the other, I argue false presentation of "other" realities is ridden with cultural bias which leads to maintaining power relations. In as such, modern Westerners, reality is linear and this view is limited. The cyclical comprehensive Indigenous view accounts for the dynamics of coexistence and interrelationships; progress and development are not logical concepts in the circular model. The past, present, and

future inform everyday actions, including political, social, economic, and spiritual spheres, which are a related whole. To assume behaviors are solely molded by economic or political issues is foreign thinking to Indigenous peoples.

In fact, the host site of Indigenous ideology is within the ceremonial context, there ideas and beliefs re-emerge and are reinforced through the physical and spiritual actors. Spirituality is central to the understanding of the whole. Ceremonies reproduce and reaffirm Indigenous ideology and identity. As Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred (1999:88) states:

Indigenism brings together words, ideas and symbols from different Indigenous cultures to serve as tools for those involved in asserting nationhood. It does not, however, supplant the localized cultures of individual communities. Indigenism is an important means of confronting the state in that it provides a unifying vocabulary and basis for collective action. But it is entirely dependent on the maintenance of the integrity of the traditional indigenous cultures and communities from which it draws strength.

The cultural expressions of Indigenous thought are diverse, but the assumptions and consequences are the same. The holistic approach offers a loose paradigm of a circle. In the heart of the circle is the spiritual understandings of the Natural Law given by the Creator. Each sphere of the circle: the social system, economy,

and political structures are fueled by the spiritual center. For example, the Potlatch of the North West Coast Natives is not just a ceremony. It was the spiritual, political, economic, and social life of the people. Time and space are collapsed in a holistic framework. What happened 3000 years ago is as important in everyday discourse as what happened yesterday or the day before. The intimate relationship with history is a social fact, and the way to map the future is also tied to events of long ago. This circular time frame moves distances in a manner foreign to Westerners. Space, in its temporal setting, is aligned with the movement of time from Creation to present. The understanding of the ties to the underworld, the earth and the universe divides space in a kinship naturalized law. The earth is positioned as mother, the moon as grandmother, the sun as my uncle, etc. The idea of compartmentalizing space according to property/ commodities is foreign and conflicts with the spiritual values that make up Aboriginal consciousness (Deloria 1994:99).

That strength of Indigenous “power” rests in and is sustained by ceremonies is demonstrated by the repeated efforts of church and state to wipe out such practices. The Potlatch, Sun Dance, Ghost Dance, and many other ceremonies were outlawed

and punishable by law. It was not until 1978 that the U.S. allowed ceremonies to be practiced openly (Jaimes 1992:17). Elders often refer to ceremonies as a source of knowledge the way Western scholars refer to their “classical” literature. Being able to live off the land and practice “a way of life” is the central privilege many Native groups seek as an inherent right to self determination.

As Minge (1994) points out:

Within the cultural nexus of the integrated community of the early American frontier, a unique synthesis grew in which African and Native American people shared a common religious experience. Not only did Africans share with Native Americans, the process of sharing cultural traditions went both ways. From the slave narratives, we learn of the role that Native American religious traditions played in African American society.

The task of recreating Indigenous identities and restructuring traditional values into a modern discourse is not a entirely a new phenomena. If I as an Indigenous female researcher, acknowledge the stories, the oral histories and Indigenous analysis of events, then I would likely arrive at a different position than if I did research only through western academic traditions. Thus, to recreate Indigenous identities/communities through establishing the traditional social/cultural arrangements; this includes re-instituting the political, spiritual, and philosophical traditions. The

traditions of Indigenous knowledge includes attention to the past, present and future. Indigenous scholars must derive their research methods and projects in keeping with their own communities' objectives and needs. How the Indigenous research and discourse are constructed has implications for the achievement of social justice and self determination. Linda Smith (1999:189) elaborates:

Reconciling market driven, competitive and entrepreneurial research, which positions New Zealand internationally, with the need for Maori to carry out research which recovers histories, reclaims lands and resources and restores justice, hardly seems possible. This is precisely why debates around self determination and the Treaty of Waitangi have been significant. The attempt by Maori to engage in the activities of the state through the mechanism of the Treaty of Waitangi has won some space in which Maori can argue for different sorts of research priorities.

The basis of an emerging Indigenous discourse is nested in values and world views which attempt to uphold egalitarian ethics. The idea of authority and position must be addressed from the outset if we are to develop an inclusive Indigenous discourse which will thrive both outside and inside the academy.

The inherent hierarchy of Western social science placed the primitive/Native at the "low" end and the civilized Westerner at the "high" end (Hill 1995:39). The power imbalance only created

an illusion of “Western” culture “impacting” Indigenous cultures, remaining in denial that Western culture is in fact a creation of “others” influence on European culture which is also a product of the colonization process. I will refrain from accounting all things “North Americans” claim as “American” (Weatherford 1988).

The Western yardstick used to measure Indigenous peoples is being revealed for what it is as Indigenous people seek to reclaim their histories, cultures and social representations/reconstructions of themselves and validate their truths by incorporating “other” Indigenous peoples. Development, industrialization, and technology, all formerly considered signs of the advancement of a civilized society, are the key elements of globalization, the latest process by which the West claims to define the value of others.

Methodology of Reciprocity

Indigenous methodological approaches a community as a network of kinship systems, as family. The youth are very important as are adults and, most importantly, elders. Everyone has important experience to share and each experience frames social realities differently, what was important to the teenagers was not to

their parents and so, the methodology of reciprocity demands an accountability to the people for the people.

What I call **sorting the sacred** is simple, we must maintain the private for protection, and what we present for consumption to the public must be consciously thought through. The task as an Indigenous researcher is to sort out “our experiences”, the act of writing, what belongs and what doesn’t. Linda Smith elaborates, “If we write without thinking critically about our writing, it can be dangerous. Writing can also be dangerous because we reinforce and maintain a style of discourse which is never innocent. Writing can be dangerous because we sometimes reveal ourselves in ways which get misappropriated and used against us (Smith 1999:36).”

The key argument here is, Indigenous peoples having been marginalized by dominant institutions designed to assimilate, resulted in a preservation and propagation of their knowledge, their power.

Scott’s (1985 and 1990) argues there should be a serious “rethinking” of the concepts of hegemony or ideological domination for all subordinate groups. Also we need to recognize that Indigenous knowledge often exist outside of those institutions that perpetuate the dominant ideology such as media and education

systems. Often the cultural traditions (festivals, millennial movements, or in our case our elders) carry the consciousness of our people. That is where our history of thought is to be found, hidden from the dominant culture and media. It is in this vein that Native and African Americans have much in common; we can learn from each other and takes on a special revelation to understand our respective hidden histories, or as Scott refers to “unofficial” histories. Two events highlight the need to further explore how interacting with each other fosters a greater appreciation for this. A trip to South Africa in 1995 and an interview with New Orleans icons, the Neville’s inspired me to learn more. Further, the Neville Brothers highlight the rich resource of knowledge expressed through oral and cultural transmission. Their knowledge is spiritual, profound, musical and provides a rich tapestry for all to cherish.

The Soul Wounds: African and Native American Discourse

I visited South Africa with an Indigenous Delegation from Canada. In Soweto we engaged in conversation with residents and public officials about the African National Congress, comparing struggles and triumphs. In the townships we could easily converse

with the people about our collective struggle to gain liberation and self-determination. The visit with ANC officials, including Walter Sisulu, Mandela's mentor, was most memorable and moving. The elder Sisulu offered me insights and inspiration as my own elder had; that made me want to reciprocate in the only way I could, offer prayers to help the people heal. We visited Robben's Island and held a pipe ceremony east of Table Mountain. Arvol Looking Horse, Keeper of the Sacred White Buffalo Calf Pipe, prayed with our brothers and sisters from the African National Congress and Assembly of First Nations. We prayed for peace, unity and healing for all Indigenous peoples suffering from "soul wounds." A little Non-African boy broke away from his parents to join us in ceremony, it was a good sign. Awestruck by the beauty , we watched as the sunset soaked clouds poured over Table Mountain like a waterfall and a warm breeze swirled around us as if to embrace our offerings, it was a good sign. It was no surprise upon returning, the Neville Brothers contacted Arvol wanting to use the Lakota word, Mitakuye Oyasmin (all my relations) for their album. Arvol gave them permission to use the word and they in turn offered their help in promoting June 21 as National Aboriginal Solidarity Day and a day of prayer. Through that connection I had

the good fortune of interviewing two of the Neville Brothers regarding our movement to reclaim our histories and begin a dialogue with each other. I present excerpts from the 1999 interview:

Q. Please explain your connection to Native Americans?

A. Charles Neville: Well, one thing is that we, the Neville family, have Native American ancestry and the Mardi Gras Indian connection, that is just part of the culture of New Orleans that has been in place for we don't even know for how long. I remember doing some research at Amistad Center and seeing an article from a news paper in the 1600 or 1700s, and something that stated that there have been a new statute passed in Louisiana in New Orleans, forbidding black people to wear feathers. Because they were trying to keep the African people separated from the Native American people. Also, there was also a picture of a man who was an African and Indian and his name was Chief Coodified and one of the things that the Native people, that the Mardi Gras Indians sing about is, Mardi Coodifio and I think that is referring to him.

Q. Why couldn't they wear feathers?

A. Charles: Well, because the government didn't want the African people to be representing themselves as the free Indian people. The Africans, they wanted them to understand that they were slaves and they didn't have the freedom and the power that the Natives had, that they were capable of doing the kind of things the Native Americans were doing.

Q. So the Mardi Gras Indians. Your family has been a part of that celebration?

A. Charles: Yes, our uncle George Landry was the first one I know, to get involved in it and he started, like working with the different groups and some different groups in the city and he formed the Wild Jopatulas, that was the group from our neighbourhood. One of the stories that he told me about, how he got started was about battling the parameadow swamp outside New Orleans. And another one of the traditional songs of all the Mardi Gras Indians is going down to the battlefield and there are all these stories of the battlefield and the battlefield and they refer to that place, where there was a battle fought between the French army and the Native Americans and Africans slaves who escaped and were living together in the parameadow swamps. And the day that battle occurred was a couple of years later African people went there to that site and honoured the people who died in the battle. The Native people and the African people who have died in that battle, they wore the regalia of the Native Americans.

A. Cyril Neville: Yes, I think that African males come from a warrior society and Native Americans, and the clothing and everything was close. Both people dressed basically with animal skins and feathers and stuff, and well, most of the stuff that I know about came from my uncle Jolly and the other guys that he use to sew with. One of the things that he use to say is that "you couldn't be a Mardi Gras Indian if you didn't know how to sew. You had to learn how to sew and in the sewing part of it came the sitting part of it, all the stories. And you know that one of the stories I heard was that one of the reasons black men started wearing Native American regalia was because, first of all, to disguise themselves to run away. To be able to get away, and the other reason was that was the closest thing to the warrior regalia that they had left at home. I think both of those reasons why the colonials or whatever you wanted to call them didn't want black people

wearing that. The reasons that they were doing that was honouring the Native American, so included in their reason for doing that. All I knew about Mardi Gras was I went with my mother and my uncle Jolly and they went to see the Indians and then during that day everybody went out in masks here, everybody put on some kind of disguise. But, in the Black neighbourhood the high light was the Mardi Gras Indian costumes.

One of the things; Song Catchers and the Song Catchers was a group that included Native Americans doing traditional Native American singing and drumming and we combined that with other American music forms. So we had traditional Native American tribes bringing singing combined with elements of jazz, rock and roll, hip hop, pop music, and blues.

Yeah, it was one of the songs on that CD, it looks at the history of colonization of America and the treatment of Native Americans and Africans by the colonial powers and how one of their aims was to keep the two peoples separated from each other and if possible make them enemies to prevent them from ever getting together.

Charles: I really feel that one of the important things is that African and Native Americans have to get to know more about each other and get to know what the parallels in our lives are and what our shared cultural elements are. And also, our shared ancestry.

Cyril: Yeah, matter of fact that was something my uncle talked about a lot. That was something that he prayed for, that one day black people would understand Native Americans and understand our connection and vice versa. It's something about more like I'm saying, African Americans and Native Americans as you know, both suffers and you know like being persecuted or what ever you

want to say its for the same reasons by the same people. There are differences, but ideologically the concrete reservation is in the city that they call the "projects" is basically the same thing as the Rez's, you know, across the nation and we are isolated in these little places for the same reasons. So my prayer is that one day that we really get to sit down and talk to each other and really be able to take our collective past and forge a future with it. It's an honour of the Native American because when we were slaves here the Native Americans were the people we ran away to, the Native Americans, we intermarried, you know and that's part of history, and one part of our history. We know the European and still to this day, they don't want us talking to each other, don't want us to know how deep the connections are between us. I think that will solve a lot of our problems collectively if we are to come together. There's things that Native Americans have to offer the Africans Americans from a spiritual stand point that we can no longer go without. And from a material stand point, we African Americans can contribute greatly to the Native Americans once we break down all these ideological barriers and everything and come together.

Well to have Native American youth to actually see where African Americans youth live and how they live and where their struggle is about and vise versa and have Native Americans, I mean African Americans come from the city and go out to the other Rez and see that what that's about. Go back over our collective history because what we need we are not getting it in the schools. Instead of being educated our children are indoctrinated; taught the party line like most Americans, history is mythology and stuff that's in books that's been passed down and the real history is in our families. That's what needs to happen, we need to come together as a family and share the same way it used to happen, getting around the campfire and share

stories and have that as a drawing point to make plans for the future. The thing about the music is that you can have actual truths about the struggle and everything else put into song and that is another way to get the message out.

That's going to be an important aspect of all this, is for people to be able to see eye to eye spiritually. I think what we spoke about earlier about the **soul wounds**, one of the biggest soul wounds that just about everybody in America is suffering from is, that Native Americans spiritualism was never recognized for what it was. It was outlawed. Until it is recognized as the spirit of this land, you can't heal the land, you can't heal the people.

Charles: One of the things of the whole concept of your work that really interests me is that the fact that it is the opportunity for some of the African American people to get together, get to know things about Native American spirituality, one of the problems that I found in trying to work with intercity, African American youth was the lack of something the Native American kid has, that is connection to elders and sacred places that are part of that tradition. Where is the African Americans. Our traditions and sacred places and ancestors are in Africa. There is no way to get back to them, reconnect to them, our connection that was destroyed with the slavery and the closest thing to that on this continent is the Native Americans spirituality which is something that is about the connection of people and the earth and the everything else, the energy of creation.

Q. So your interest is working with the youth and try to provide them with a sense of connection with this land. Which could only be achieved through Native American people?

A. Charles: Yes, Well, it's just that seems to be the idea is to bring together not only people here on this

continent but all the people who are, who share spiritual concepts that are related to our being part of this one system that is the earth. Being able to get together and get to know about each other and know that we all know the same thing, we can't have same traditions but really similar traditions that come from the same source. And I think that for here on this continent, just the tragic of the African people being totally disconnected from that and having no way of getting back to it is something that can be really helped by getting connected by the spirit here.

Q. We identified with the struggle in South Africa when we visited there in 1995. We identified with the whole way of thinking of the Indigenous people. So, that's one of the reasons, through that trip to South Africa and going through the Truth Commission, they talk about soul wounds. Did you know they're huge huge Neville fans. I don't know if you're aware.

A. Cyril: Yeah, we know. It was through the years we have run into a lot of the musicians from there. Where they be playing on the radio and a West Africa and South Africa two of the places that is something else that you know I still want to go back to Africa and still want to if I can at least go to that thing they call "**the gate of no return**," on Gory Island right off Senegal which was the little island that was used to break slaves before they put them on ships. They say when you turned and looked through this door, it dealt with the last glimpse of Africa that they got you know. And to experience that I talk to African American people who went there, who African American people who where not in touch with who they were in Africa, and were actually healed by their experience. In that door and they are breaking down by being connected with all the ancestors and everything and the same thing on this side.

Charles: You know, that is one of the things that I would like to be able to do to, have this thing going around like that, where you have people, where you know Native Americans and African Americans going on the same journey for the same reason and coming back here and going to the holy places here for the same reason. You know to learn about each other and you know to take what ever we can from the past that was good and make a good future out of it . My music expresses what I think and tells the visions I have which is mainly to help bring spiritual awareness to the young African Americans. Young African Americans committed to African American people who are so conditioned by the so called “America dream”, money and possessions being the most important thing in life, and no real awareness of the fact of the reality of life is in the spirit.

Cyril & Charles Sing:

Mada Cooda fio
Eeyi aaaa Eeyi aaaa
We are Indians, Indians
We are Indians of the Nation
The wild wild creation
We won't kneel down, We won't kneel down
Not on the ground, Not on the ground
Oh how I love to hear them call my Indian race
Mitakuye Oyasin

It was empowering to work with people that completely understood, who offered their visions, their aspirations and support. In their latest album Valance St. they dedicated a song to

the Unity Riders titled Tears. The understanding is, the ancestors massacred at Wounded Knee never received proper burials in their mass graves at Pine Ridge Reservation. Arvol and others spiritual leaders revealed before “the hoop of the nation can mend” they must “wipe the tears of seven generations” (Hill 1999). The riders embarked on a spiritual journey to retrace the footsteps of their ancestors and offer prayers and sacrifice. The journey is to “heal the past so we can have a better future”(Hill 1999). The journey continues to this day.

The interview helped awaken me to a long overlooked fact, that we busy ourselves trying to “prove to the oppressor our point of view” and continue to position “them” as the authorities. We have forgotten to connect with the people we share early histories with and those histories have been maintained through the oral transmissions, such as the Mardi Gras celebrations. Secondly, if we are to break the pattern set forth by colonial regimes to divide and conquer, we must work together to acquire liberation from colonial thinking, then all that we present is a fallacy. The trauma Indigenous peoples experience through genocide and ethnocide is very similar to the trauma of relocation and slavery experience by African Americans, namely the soul wounds. Thirdly, the healing

movement initiated by North American Indigenous peoples is a potential unifying force among the grassroots communities. If our social, political, economic institutions were shaken with the crushing of our spirituality, then we must acknowledge the pain endured by African Americans and empower our movements through exercising self determination, by reeducating each other about our collective histories working towards the common goal of social justice and healing to achieve intellectual, spiritual and emotional liberation. We must reinvent our reference points into a parallel activism rather than a hierarchy of oppression. Minge (1994) correctly asserts:

Equally well, we can rest assured that whenever faces gathered around the campfire, there were Africans there to serve as spiritual guides into a different kind of wilderness. When there were dances to celebrate, deaths to mourn, or festivals to mark the passing of the seasons, there were Africans present. In addition, we must never forget that on the "trail where we cried," there were also African tears. This we can never forget.

Indigenous Knowledge and Power

Monopolies of truth are crumbling as more and more Natives, Africans, Asians, and women begin to enter and challenge the Western intelligentsia.

I am far more interested in constructing Indigenous knowledge as a positive move towards intellectual contributions than being deconstructive. In fact, it was an elder that pointed out: ‘be positive, don’t use your energy to be negative and tear ‘them’ down, if you do then you are one of them, you are behaving like them (Buck 1989).” What Hubert Buck meant was that the assimilation process will have been complete if I adopt the same behavior that we accuse our oppressors of. Hubert also reminded me it was our way, the Haudenosaunee way, to be respectful of other peoples beliefs and to “share” rather than attempt to control. Taiaiaike Alfred (1999:132) states:

What is needed in countries like Canada and the United States is the kind of education that would force the general population to engage with realities other than their own, increasing their capacity to empathize with others to see points of views and to understand other people’s motivations and desires...However, indigenous people have succeeded in altering non-indigenous people’s perceptions through dialogue in institutions of higher learning...These leaders will practice a new style of Native politics that will reject colonial assumptions and mentalities that have allowed state domination to continue. It will recognize and counter the states efforts to coopt, divide, and conquer communities.

Alfred correctly urges the consciousness of Indigenous leadership/scholars of intellectual traditions to avoid at all costs

allowing Indigenous issues, debates and ideas to become lost in the Western discourse vacuum. To engage in attempts to validate ourselves through “colonial eyes” is to continually slide back into colonization. I am only interested in decolonization and rebuilding our knowledge. We must begin to talk to each other and concern ourselves with making connections which are positive acts and develop Indigenous knowledge which nurtures a process of re-establishing our ties to each other.

Not Seeking Approval but Respect

Native science contextualizes the spoken word as fact and places the experiences of the people as a social truth. Linda Smith (1999:74) points out:

The arguments of different indigenous peoples based on spiritual relationships to the universe, to the landscape and to stones, rocks, insects and other things, seen and unseen, have been difficult to arguments for western systems of knowledge to deal with or accept. These arguments give a partial indication of the different world views and alternative ways of coming to know, and of being, which still endure within the indigenous world. Concepts of spirituality which Christianity attempted to destroy, then to appropriate, and then to claim, are critical sites of resistance for indigenous peoples. The values, attitudes, concepts and language embedded in the beliefs about spirituality represent, in many cases, the clearest

contrast and mark of difference between indigenous peoples and the West. It is one of the few parts of ourselves which the West cannot decipher, cannot understand and cannot control...yet.

In representing ourselves, we face the dilemma of cooption, the loss of protection of the sacred and the threat of exposing ourselves too readily to our oppressors, creating a vulnerability. The issue of moving private knowledge into a public arena might lead to consumption, deconstruction and worse, might have a hand in our own oppression, as Scott points out, our private spheres were our sites of resistance. We move into public discourses with conservative caution, neither trying to prove ourselves or look for approval, we must move in a unified manner in the pursuit of social justice.

Bridging A Truth

The central issue is decolonizing ourselves intellectually, spiritually and emotionally, which will allow our societies a degree of self governance, self determination and liberation from colonial policies. The political dynamics are often informed by traditional beliefs. The assumption, even in the Neville case, is that our rights are conferred by the Creator. The resistance to colonial forces is,

(again), is not just a reaction to material, colonial domination, but an expression of sacred knowledge given to the people by the Creator. The strength of Indigenous “power” via ceremonies and celebrations is witnessed in the repeated efforts of colonists to wipe out such practices. The shared histories of Native and African American knowledge are alive in practice because of the oral mode of transmission and as shown in the Neville’s interview. Indeed, there is an ongoing conversation in which Indigenous peoples have long participated, sources we find our knowledge within our families, elders and cultural expressions. The experiential nature of Indigenous knowledge fosters a rich and total sense of understanding **process**. Once one enters the Indigenous mode of learning , one seeks knowledge that is holistic and accumulative, not deconstructive and critical. The subjective, human nature of inquiry is defined by several truths and individual must be prepared to engage in acquiring knowledge which is spiritual and emotional; the heart works in conjunction with mind. The physical, spiritual, and meta physical are realities coexisting within a holistic framework. The framework abides by spiritual laws and not human (man) made laws. It is something our ancestors understood and practiced, we must go back and acknowledge the multi-

generational pain or soul wounds our young no doubt will inherit if we do not “mend the sacred hoop.” We must retrace our ancestors footsteps before we can move forward as a balanced peoples, this is the spirit if our ancestors knowledge, it is our path to true liberation and self determination.

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